



Wesleyan Theology and Social Science: The Dance of Practical Divinity and Discovery

M. Kathryn Armistead Brad D. Strawn and Ronald W. Wright

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Science and religion are living, organic, and creative traditions. Both see humans as profoundly interconnected and in some way responsible for our environs. This worldview is especially true for social science and Wesleyan religious tradition. While the dance between science and religion will always be complex, it can also be enjoyable and mutually satisfying. However when couples dance only one at a time can lead and both have to acknowledge the importance of the other. This book is written with the conviction that theology and science can have a beneficial relationship if only both recognize their mutual value to the lives of persons. The Methodist tradition links the welfare of the body with care for the soul. Historically, ministry involved tending to physical and psychological needs of the Methodist band members but also to non-churched poor and imprisoned. Thus Methodists built places of worship, schools, orphanages, and hospitals. For John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, practical divinity always involved attention to whole persons including their living conditions and basic physical needs. He sought to improve life for all. Therefore throughout his life, Wesley was interested in theology but also scientific discovery as paths toward a better future. He believed that both were of value to help people move toward perfection. He even attended lectures and offered medical treatment in the first Methodist meeting hall in Bristol, England. As a scientific practitioner Wesley wrote the best selling book, *Primitive Physic or An Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases* using the cutting edge science of his day. Packed next to the Bible, this book traveled with countless pioneers as they settled the territories that became the United States. Methodism has a long tradition of using science and religion to carry out the biblical mandate to go into the world and make disciples for Jesus Christ. This book seeks to continue that legacy by bringing current trends in psychology into conversation with Wesleyan theology. Composed of essays that represent different psychologies and theological traditions, which trace their roots to Wesley, this book aims at creating a space where science and theology can partner and dance. In the book readers will find positive psychology, self psychology, object relations, family systems, moral psychology, and neuroscience in conversation with various theologies. Under this canopy, the contributors see themselves as people called Methodists seeking to follow the example of Wesley to use all available tools to enable persons to live fully and well.

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